

**United States Department of the Interior**  
 National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Stark House

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 4945 Lindbergh Lake Road

City or town: Condon State: MT County: Missoula

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A X B X C \_\_\_ D

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE: professional

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: vernacular rustic log

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE (foundation)

WOOD: Log (walls)

METAL: Steel (roof)

### Summary Paragraph

The Stark House, located in the Swan River drainage near Cygnet Lake and Lindbergh Lake in Missoula County, Montana (NW ¼ of Section 13, Township 19 North, Range 17 West), sits at an elevation of 4,377 feet. The surrounding area is a combination of forest lands, streams, lakes, and wetlands. The property lies on the west side of Cygnet Lake, a small lake below the outlet of Lindbergh Lake. Except for Lairds Lodge (NR-listed August 17, 1990, NR #90001213), this area was undeveloped when the Starks built their house. The lakeshore around Cygnet Lake has since been subdivided into tracts. Swan Valley is sandwiched between the Mission Range and the Mission Mountains Wilderness to the west and the Swan Range and the Bob Marshall Wilderness to the east, all within the Flathead National Forest.

### Narrative Description

The Stark House is situated on the western shore of Cygnet Lake in the Swan Valley of northwestern Montana. The hand-hewn log building is located on a 2.376-acre parcel. The house is accessed by a short private drive off the public-access Lindbergh Lake Road, approximately 3.3 miles off of Montana State Highway 83.

### Stark House (one contributing building, built 1939, remodeled in 1953, 1991).

The house faces northwest-southeast. For ease of description, the wall facing the northwest is referred to as the north elevation, the wall facing the southwest is called the west elevation, the east elevation description encompasses the wall facing the northeast, and the wall facing toward the southeast is referred to as the south elevation.

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The 26' by 40' one and a half story log building is protected by a normal slope gable roof topped with a ribbed steel roof supported by extended log purlins. A stone chimney with insert projects from the east roof slope. Walls consist of locally sourced western larch logs that rest on poured concrete footings, a concrete half-wall, and full concrete basement. Corners display saddle notching and the logs, including the notching, exhibit concrete daubing. The exceptionally-well applied daubing overlays expertly cut split pole chinking between the logs. All windows, except for those in the north shed porch entry, sport half-log trim; the windows on the shed entry are trimmed with dimensional wood boards.

The interior of the Stark House continues to hold the original furniture that was also constructed by the skilled John Stark. In addition to the furniture, John Stark also constructed all the built-ins, such as the cupboards. The house and its interior furnishings remain much the same as when constructed.

North Elevation

The north façade is fronted by a small raised shed roof enclosed entry porch featuring board-and-batten construction approached by a six-step wood staircase. The shed roof is also topped by ribbed steel roofing. The north elevation of the porch holds a ribbon of three one-light fixed windows fronted by storm units. The west wall of the porch contains a six-light wood mandoor that allows ingress into the house. A small open landing immediately to the west of the enclosed porch, also approached by the staircase, occupies the remaining portion of the façade. The staircase and porch sport pole handrails. The wall immediately above the open porch contains paired nine-light sliding windows and the gable holds a single hopper-style nine-light unit.

West Elevation

The west elevation displays more of the concrete basement half-wall than viewed on other elevations, extending up the wall about 4 ½' at its greatest extent. Basement fenestration includes two paired modern man-doors toward the north end of the building, and two paired ribbon of three, four-light window units composed of a fixed unit flanked by a sliding unit on each side. The main floor holds a ribbon of three, nine-light window units composed of a fixed unit flanked by a sliding unit on each side, and paired nine-light sliders.

South Elevation

Four windows occur in the south elevation, three on the ground floor and one in the gable. Ground floor windows include a ribbon of three single-light windows, a center fixed-unit flanked by a sliding unit. Positioned to each side of this ribbon of three windows is a single 15-light fixed window. The gable holds a paired nine-light sliding unit. A small bracketed wood shelf projects from the wall below the ground floor windows, likely to hold pots of flowers.

East Elevation

East elevation fenestration includes a ribbon of three single light windows but in actuality is a single oversize pane sporting faux muntins that give the appearance of individual units. The wall also holds a two-light sliding unit, a single light double-hung unit, and a nine-light/multi-panel wood door; a step that would have approached to the door is missing.

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### **Integrity**

The Stark House retains all seven aspects of integrity. Integrity of design, workmanship, and materials continue to exemplify John Stark's fine craftsmanship and wood working skills. The hours devoted to the project, all completed by hand with axes, hand saws, crosscut saws, chisels, adzes, and drawknives, is readily apparent. Changes to the building include construction of the small enclosed front porch around 1953, within the period of significance, and the replacement of the wood shake roof with metal roofing in 1991; roof insulation was also added at this time. Interior changes include the addition of a basement concrete floor with wood flooring overlay, and a furnace in 1990, also in the basement. Exterior modifications to the Stark House are in keeping with its original rustic appearance and compatible with the historic character of the building, while the interior changes allow for a greater livability of the house.

Integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association also are extremely strong. Standing in its original location, the area surrounding the Stark House remains much the same as it did 80 years ago when construction began. The area is still considered remote with the nearest town of Seeley Lake 20 miles distant, while the nearest city, Missoula, lies 75 miles away. After leaving the main thoroughfare, a gravel road leads to the Stark House just as it did in 1939. The surrounding forest provides habitat for a variety of wildlife including deer, elk, mountain lions, bears, and wolves. Plants abound in the forest, from an array of wildflowers to huckleberries, sedges, grasses and forbs. A multitude of water fowl as well as native trout frequent Cygnet Lake.

In addition to the building itself, John Stark also built the cupboards and much of lodgepole furniture inside the cabin including tables, rocking chairs, lounge chairs, bookcases, and beds.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ART

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1939 – 1970

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1939 (original construction)

1953 (porch added)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

John Stark

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

John Stark

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Stark House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, at the local level of significance under criteria B and C. Under Criterion B, John Stark is recognized throughout the Swan Valley as an exceptional log and wood craftsman. His skill in this field is displayed not only by the hand-crafted log house he built, but also by his finely built log furniture and wood sculptures. The basement of the Stark House is the actual location where

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John Stark designed and created his skillfully constructed wood furniture and wood sculptures, products that continue to be sought after today by collectors.

Under Criterion C, the log-constructed Stark House, which served as the life-long adult home of John Stark and his wife Marie, stands as an exquisite example of mid-century rural vernacular rustic architecture in the Swan Valley of Montana. John Stark's carpentry skills highlight the precision construction of the Stark House, the quality and craftsmanship which registers a notch above most log structures. While most log buildings tend to lack overt ornamentation, the high-quality craftsmanship featured on the Stark House effectively serves in its own right as a form of ornamentation. The beautiful log house displays the craftsmanship and attention to detail John Stark devoted to all of his projects.

The period of significance begins with when John and Marie Stark first moved into the house in 1939 and continues until 1970, the end of the historic period.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

#### **Historic Context: Swan Valley Settlement**

Because of the area's remoteness and the lack of mining opportunities, the upper Swan Valley of northwestern Montana wasn't permanently settled until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - relatively late in this nation's history. The local native people, primarily the Pend d' Oreille tribe, had used the area for thousands of years, they camped here seasonally in the summer and fall to hunt, fish, and gather roots and berries.

The Euro-American presence in the area initially consisted of a few British Hudson Bay and North West companies trappers. By the 1880s, however, logging in the area increased concomitantly with the growth of mining at Butte and other mining camps to the south. The forests of the Swan-Seeley area yielded a copious number of trees for use in the mine shafts, helping fuel the post-Civil War industrial revolution.<sup>1</sup> The first permanent settlers in the area were B.B. Holland and his son Charles, who came to the area in the 1890s and later filed their homesteads under the original Homestead Act of 1862.

At that time, the upper Swan Valley primarily reflected a checkerboard ownership pattern with the nascent U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Northern Pacific Railroad Company (NPRC) owning alternate sections of land. Ownership of certain sections of land by the NPRC sprang from the Federal Government granting the railroad company lands equivalent to every other section in townships adjacent to the proposed route of the line. Sometimes, land near the rail lines had previously been claimed; in those instances, the government allowed the Railroad to choose other land in different areas, including the Swan River and Clearwater drainages.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Axline, *Double Arrow National Register Nomination*, (listed 11/24/2014, NR #14000958), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

<sup>2</sup> Janene Caywood, *Cultural Resource Survey of Four Projects Along Montana Highway 83, Condon-Clearwater Junction* (Helena: Montana Department of Transportation, 27 March 1989), p. 11.

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By the late 1880s, the timber standing on the grant lands started to be sold by the NPRC, either by the Railroad's active cutting and selling of the timber, or by the sale of the actual land to parties, such as the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. The lack of regulatory oversight and cutting of trees on public land eventually resulted in the establishment of the first Forest Reserves in 1891.<sup>3</sup> This was followed in 1905 by the transfer of the Forest Reserves to the Department of Agriculture, with a corresponding shift in name to the National Forests. The Forest Homestead Act of June 11, 1906 allowed for the withdrawal of national forest lands for agriculture upon the request of a claimant after inspection and consent by the Forest Service. By the turn of the twentieth century, much of the forested land was set aside by the federal government and the State of Montana, incorporating it into the Lolo and Flathead National Forests, with the establishment of the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas after 1964. The Forest Service assumed a major role in the economy and employment of the area. Concomitantly, logging also played a major role in the area. Logging employed many people who called the Swan Valley home.

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh flew over what was then called Elbow Lake. He later camped near the lake for several weeks, compliments of the Anaconda Company. In Lindbergh's honor, the name of the lake was subsequently changed to its present appellation, Lindbergh Lake.<sup>4</sup>

Illustrating the remoteness of the Swan Valley, in 1928, Bob Marshall, namesake of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, undertook a hike of the area. He began his hike at the old Echo Trailhead and completed it at the Seeley Lake Post Office, after passing Elbow (Lindbergh) Lake, near the present Stark House. His travels logged 288 miles and included passing over 12 mountains, visiting four fire lookouts, and averaging an astounding 36 miles per day!<sup>5</sup> On August 16, 1940, a 950,000-acre area, east of the Stark House, was designated as the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Local celebrity also touched the Swan Valley area in 1946 when Miriam Underhill and her husband, Robert, began climbs in the nearby Mission Mountains. Ms. Underhill and her partner, Alice Damesme, gained fame in 1929 when they became the first women to ascend Mount Grepon in the Alps without any men. Such a daring act was unheard due to prejudices and obstacle created by the societal norms of the time.<sup>6</sup> The Underhills used Laird's Lodge at Lindbergh Lake, just south of the Stark House, as their base.<sup>7</sup> Ms. Underwood became an early

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<sup>3</sup> Janene Caywood, *Cultural Resource Survey of Four Projects Along Montana Highway 83, Condon-Clearwater Junction* (Helena: Montana Department of Transportation, 27 March 1989), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Molly Loomis, "Going Manless," *The American Alpine Journal*, (2005), pp. 99, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 34, 35.

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advocate for women to climb without the accompaniment of men and is considered one of the greatest female climbers the United States has produced.<sup>8</sup>

The years 1948 and 1949 witnessed severe weather events in the Swan River area. In 1948, the Swan River flooded, one of the three highest flows recorded from 1922 to 1988. This was followed in 1949, by what became known as the “49 blow.” Western Montana, northern Idaho, and eastern Washington received disastrous winds that tore through the forests knocking down millions of board feet of timber, predominately Douglas fir, western larch, and Engelmann spruce. The Lindbergh Lake area, very near the location of the Stark House, had approximately 700 acres of downed timber. The winds not only caused the felling of millions of trees, but also led to a severe bark beetle epidemic in the northern Rocky Mountains.<sup>9</sup> The blowdown precipitated Lee and Percy Wilhelm moving their saw mill in 1950 from Swan Lake to a location south of Lindbergh Lake Road and processing timber from the storm above Lindbergh Lake.<sup>10</sup>

Today, recreation plays an important role in the economy of the area, attracting thousands of people a year. Similar to the early years when people from the east came out to visit and stay at the lodges to recreate and fish, those activities have carried forward to the present. Similar to when Miriam Underhill walked the trails of the area, hiking in the beautiful mountains that surround the area remains a draw.

### **Settlement of the Swan Valley Area**

Settlement of the area occurred slowly. Ben Holland was one of the few who settled in the Swan Valley under the original Homestead Act of 1862, and he didn’t do so until 1893, receiving his patent in 1905. Holland was familiar with the area from his years of using the area for camping and grazing his horses. Holland was soon joined by his son, Charles, in 1894 when he constructed a house on land next to his father’s. The elder Holland became the Forest Reserve Ranger for the Upper Swan District serving from 1899 to 1913.<sup>11</sup>

For people wishing to settle in the mountainous and timbered Swan River area in the early 1900s, two primary options existed: the first being homesteading under the 1906 Homestead Act in Forest Reserves (“the Forest Homestead Act”). Many future-residents to the area arrived in the mid-1910s, filing under this act. In all, over 200 people filed to homestead in the upper Swan Valley, but only 102 were successful in proving up and gaining ownership of their parcel of

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Ware, ed., *Notable American Women*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 650; Molly Loomis, “Going Manless,” *The American Alpine Journal*, (2005), p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 36-38; “Timber Harvesting,” *Trails of the Past: Historical Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960*, Flathead National Forest, found at <http://npshistory.com/publications/usfs/region/1/flathead/history/chap10.htm> accessed January 8, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 7, 8, 9, 10.

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land.<sup>12</sup> Pursuit of land following this course required that one could only file to homestead USFS lands deemed to have agricultural potential.<sup>13</sup> This entailed proving up a Forest Homestead and gaining ownership with 20 acres put into agriculture.<sup>14</sup> The Upper Swan Valley was both heavily forested and also pockmarked with numerous glacial potholes, ponds, and wet meadows. The only way to achieve the 20-acre agriculture requirement was by clearing the timber and often draining the wet areas. Other requirements included establishing permanent buildings, a task made easier through the clearing of the land of timber for agricultural use, the timber which could then supply material, mostly log, to build the cabins, barns, sheds, and fencing. A few nearby small sawmills also provided a limited amount of lumber for flooring, doors, and other needs.

However, complicating this process of acquiring land via the Timber Homestead Act was the lack of legal surveys to establish property lines. Without the completed surveys, no one could tell with certainty whose land they were on. The General Land Office (GLO) of the Department of Interior was mandated by Congress to perform this function. Eventually, the GLO ramped up their efforts to survey the Swan Valley, and by 1914 completed the portions with agricultural potential, allowing both the Swan River drainage and nearby Clearwater drainage, the prospect of hosting homesteaders, despite the relatively small amount of land available for settlement.<sup>15</sup> Despite the allure of these areas, those who attempted agriculture in these drainages often found it very difficult to make a living.

### Settlement on Lindbergh and Cygnet Lakes

The second option to acquire land in the Upper Swan drainage area was through purchase from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, via their land grant, the largest in US history, which encompassed 17 million acres in Montana.<sup>16</sup> By the late 1880s, the NPRC began to either sell the grant lands to other entities, or commenced cutting and selling the timber that grew on it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> USDA Forest Service. Homestead Records. Upper Swan Valley Historical Society Archives. 1904 – 1941.

<sup>13</sup> USDA Forest Service. Homestead Records. Upper Swan Valley Historical Society Archives. 1904 – 1941; Roberto H. Valdez, *The Santa Fe National Forest Land Claims Archive: A Study of Homestead Files and Entryman Applicants 1906-1937*, University of New Mexico UNM Digital Repository, The Rio Chama Basin: Land, Water and Community, Center for Regional Studies, revised 24 March 2016, p. 21, found at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/86f5/02311b7be579d623b24c86ce4cab285bcab4.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto H. Valdez, *The Santa Fe National Forest Land Claims Archive: A Study of Homestead Files and Entryman Applicants 1906-1937*, University of New Mexico UNM Digital Repository, The Rio Chama Basin: Land, Water and Community, Center for Regional Studies, revised March 24, 2016, p. 91, found at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/86f5/02311b7be579d623b24c86ce4cab285bcab4.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> USDA Forest Service. Homestead Records. Upper Swan Valley Historical Society Archives. 1904 – 1941; Janene Caywood, *Cultural Resource Survey of Four Projects Along Montana Highway 83, Condon-Clearwater Junction* (Helena: Montana Department of Transportation, 27 March 1989), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, *Montana, A History of Two Centuries*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> Janene Caywood, *Cultural Resource Survey of Four Projects Along Montana Highway 83, Condon-Clearwater Junction* (Helena: Montana Department of Transportation, 27 March 1989), 11.

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People could also purchase land from the Railroad for purposes other than timber harvesting. The acquisition of land from the Railroad by private parties for their personal use also occurred, sometimes with the realization of the recreational possibilities of the Swan area. The increased use of automobiles and the improved roads allowed such use, that otherwise would have greatly restricted the area's access. Some of these recreational opportunities presented themselves as vacation lodges, dude ranches, and other private estate holdings. Small towns sprang up as the need for services increased. These towns, such as Condon, just over 10 miles by road from the Stark House, catered to a wide variety of interests in these areas, including the burgeoning recreation industry.<sup>18</sup>

In the Swan Valley, one of the earlier purchases of land directly from the NPRC occurred by Eli "Cap" and Julia (also called Tyne) Laird, who in 1926 purchased 1000 acres from the NPRC at the northeast end of Lindbergh Lake (then called Elbow Lake), the lake immediately southwest of Cygnet Lake, the future location of the Stark House. On some of this land, the Lairds, with help from their son-in-law John Stark, began construction in 1927 of the National Register-listed Laird's Lodge Historic District, which included the main lodge building followed by construction of a dining hall, four cabins, and a tack shed.<sup>19</sup> The construction effort lasted through 1935.<sup>20</sup>

The lodge and surrounding buildings present a rustic style, all constructed from logs and stone. The craftsmanship is high, resulting in sturdy and comfortable buildings and a snug escape from the elements. The buildings reflect the period of construction, displaying stylized architecture, pleasing to visitors from the east.

Cap Laird was not only a former steamboat captain on Lake Coeur d'Alene and big game hunter in Montana and Idaho, but also a noted woodworker.<sup>21</sup> This later skill he shared with John Stark, a no doubt important bond between the two. Together, Cap and John helped with the construction of the lodge and built much of the furniture contained within, furniture that elicited great praise from many who visited the lodge. John and Cap's abilities allowed them to overcome many issues that came with living in a remote area, including the lack of electricity, an issue the two overcame when they built a small hydroelectric generating facility at the outlet of Cygnet Lake.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Janene Caywood, *Cultural Resource Survey of Four Projects Along Montana Highway 83, Condon-Clearwater Junction* (Helena: Montana Department of Transportation, 27 March 1989), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> The lodge building and the various cabins have since been sold off separately to various private owners. Laird's Lodge Historic District was listed 17 August 1990, NR #90001213. Lois Ukrainetz, *The History of the Lindbergh Lake Lodge*, 1993, Unpublished document.

<sup>20</sup> The district derives its significance for its association with the tourist boom in western Montana in the 1920s, a time witnessing the rapid growth of tourism that allowed a steady means of income for such businesses. Laird's Lodge Historic District is listed under criteria A and C.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan Latta, *Laird's Lodge Historic District National Register Nomination* (listed 17 August 1990, NR # 90001213), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

<sup>22</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon *Montana: Voices of the Swan*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 224.

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The Laird's Lodge changed ownership and names a few times through the years, first when the operation sold in 1945 to the Hickey and Greening families who renamed the business the Diamond L Bar Ranch. It was during the 1970s that the buildings included in the Laird's Lodge Historic District sold to separate families. In 1987, the lodge operation itself again sold and became known as the Lindbergh Lake Lodge. It has experienced several more ownership changes since then.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Stark House**

Early on, people often viewed log cabins as a temporary solution to housing, to be replaced when time and money allowed. This changed in the late 1800s to early 1900s as rustic-style designed log buildings became fashionable for vacations and retreats. This melding of rustic-style buildings with the surroundings continued to increase in popularity into the 1930s and 1940s, the time when John Stark constructed his house, the subject of this nomination.

The construction of the nearby Laird's Lodge, its operation as a tourist get-away, and the relationship between Cap and Tyne Laird and their daughter, Marie, and son-in-law, John Stark, led directly to the future construction of the Stark House. While many people acquired land around much of the area near the north end of Lindbergh Lake and Cygnet Lake via subdivision, John and Marie Stark acquired their parcel where they built the Stark House directly from Cap and Tyne in 1939. The Starks selected a parcel about .3 mile from the lodge, on the west side of Cygnet Lake, a small body of water that formed below the outlet of Lindbergh Lake.<sup>24</sup>

The construction of the Stark House, that would be John and Marie's permanent residence, started in 1939. Conveniently, Marie kept a diary of the progress of construction, the names of the workers hired who helped each work day, and small notations. John and Marie hired several local men to assist with construction and Cap Laird occasionally took time from his busy schedule at the dude ranch to assist John with the log work.<sup>25</sup> On June 19, the crew began the initial step of clearing the construction area. The crew employed a variety of tools to clear the vegetation, including the use of dynamite to free the larger tree stumps; "Nat and Emil worked. Blew up some stumps." The clearing crew also literally used "horsepower" during their clearing activities as noted by Marie, "used the horse." The use of horses to assist with the construction of the cabin varied from a single animal to what Marie termed as "a team." In addition to the horse, the crew also relied on the motorized assistance of a truck.<sup>26</sup>

By June 26, the vegetation was cleared and construction of the forms for the concrete footings, walls, and floor began. On July 5, a crew of seven people mixed and poured the basement

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<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 33, 40; Nathan Latta, *Laird's Lodge Historic District National Register Nomination* (listed 17 August 1990, NR # 90001213), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT; Lois Ukrainetz, *The History of the Lindbergh Lake Lodge*, 1993, Unpublished document.

<sup>24</sup> Marie Stark's personal diary, 1939, copy on file with Steve Lamar.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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concrete walls. Marie wrote, "Poured concrete all day and evening. Crew – Dad, Emil, John, Jack, Bill, Harold and Nat. Used 39 sacks cement." Marie noted that by that date, \$49.30 had been used for lumber. The concrete set for three days until July 9 when the forms began to be removed on and off until July 13.<sup>27</sup>

Other necessities included the grading of the road, which began on July 2 and continued July 14. As with all projects, the weather occasionally factored in as no work transpired on July 3 due to rain.<sup>28</sup>

On July 3, John received a U.S. Forest Service timber permit for the cutting of larch trees for use for the 26' by 40' log construction. The logs had a tree volume totaling 4 MBF, with a price tag of a grand total of \$6.00.<sup>29</sup> On July 15<sup>th</sup>, a couple of the work crew began cutting down the larch trees and skidding the logs to the house site using a combination of horses and an old truck. The logs were then peeled, readied for the process of lifting onto the building, and notched to secure them into place. On July 19 Marie continued, "Nat, Emil, and Fred cut and peeled logs all day." As of August 4, three rounds of house logs were fitted in place. Several days later, the crew laid the log floor joists.<sup>30</sup>

Marie's dairy notes tended to be brief. However, she often provides insight regarding those who helped, such as her remark on August 30 where she acknowledged "Freddy" was present, "but didn't do much."<sup>31</sup>

The construction of the house progressed steadily with the crew working every day except Sundays. Around September 1, "Harold" was paid \$20.00 for the use of his horses. By September 7<sup>th</sup> the log walls were erected, along with the log ridgepole and rafters. On August 26, John acquired roofing lumber and flooring for a cost of "\$50.10 (paired with *undecipherable* check)." The roof boards went on quickly with that aspect of the project commencing on September 8 and completed on September 11.<sup>32</sup>

Peeling poles for chinking first occurred on September 13, the same day "Jack" went into town to bring back materials for completing the roof, tile for lining the chimney, and bringing back a few windows. Installation of the chinking transpired over the next several days. Final chinking occurred by John on September 22. John also cut the back door that day.<sup>33</sup>

September 30 marked the first day that some of John and Marie's furniture was moved into the house. Still not completed, the finish work began – including the chimney, windows, stairs, interior wall partitions, wiring, and plumbing. Chimney preparation started on October 1 and

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Flathead National Forest Larch Tree Removal Permit, issued July 3, 1939 to John Stark.

<sup>30</sup> Marie Stark's personal diary, 1939, copy on file with Steve Lamar.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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lasted the entire month. Marie's entry for October 2, "Hauled rock and sand for chimney," provides little information regarding the origin of the materials; however, based on the vast majority of the materials being locally obtained, such as the logs, it is suspected that the rock for the chimney was also derived from a not-to-distant source. Inching closer, the house was wired from October 21 to the 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>34</sup>

Window installation appears to have occurred sporadically, with a major push occurring from November 10 to November 20, though work on the windows continued into December. On Thanksgiving, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Marie noted, "John put up part of partition between kitchen and living room." With winter weather upon them and several tasks yet to be finished, Marie and John moved into the unfinished log house on December 9<sup>th</sup>, a note that elicited the use of an exclamation point at the end of her entry. Although now living in the house, John and Marie continued putting the final touches on the construction project into early 1940.<sup>35</sup>

The walk-in basement was then set up as a workshop. It was in this basement where John spent hours and hours designing and constructing his craftsman-quality custom rustic furniture, custom cabinets, and crafted wood carvings.<sup>36</sup>

In 1953, John and Marie added an enclosed front porch, a virtual requirement to help with the cold. Other modifications occurred in 1991 when the wood shake roof was replaced with metal roofing for safety reasons, and roof insulation added at that time.

In the early 1980s Vern and Joanne Guyer inherited the house from their longtime friend and mentor, John Stark. After Marie passed away, John decided to give his house and all the contents, most which John had crafted – furniture, photos, artwork, and wildlife carvings – to the Guyers. In a letter to Vern Guyer, Stark wrote, "You are the one person who would appreciate this place."<sup>37</sup> The Guyers have preserved most of the contents of the Stark's house with the exception of the wildlife carvings made by John, which were donated to the Swan Valley Community Library.<sup>38</sup>

### **John and Marie Stark**

John Stark was born March 29, 1904 in Cloquet, Minnesota to Joseph and Lena Stark, immigrants from Holland.<sup>39</sup> By 1910, the Stark family lived in Coeur d' Alene, Idaho on North

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 79. Much of the history in *Voices* was compiled from oral history interviews of the early occupants of the Swan Valley area.

<sup>38</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> Montana Certificate of Death for John Stark, filed 7 March 1989; A Census of Minnesota, Population Schedule, 1905.

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Second Street.<sup>40</sup> The family continued to live in Coeur d'Alene in 1920 when John turned 15.<sup>41</sup> Six years later, in May of 1926, John married Marie Laird, also a resident of Coeur d'Alene.<sup>42</sup> Marie Laird Stark was born in 1905 to Eli "Cap" and Julia Laird in Coeur d'Alene, where she also grew up.<sup>43</sup> Marie's parents came to the Swan Valley and constructed the nearby Laird's Lodge. The 1930 Census found John and Marie continuing to live in Coeur d'Alene, as John worked in a lumber mill.<sup>44</sup> Exactly when John and Marie arrived in Montana and lived full-time remains unclear; however, his obituary states he and Marie moved in 1926, supporting a second source that mentioned he helped construct the nearby Laird's Lodge, for which construction began in 1927.<sup>45</sup> As John helped construct Laird's Lodge, it is likely Marie at least visited the area prior to her and John's move to Montana permanently.

In 1942, John registered for military service. At the time, he listed his employer as Eli Laird, his father-in-law. He also worked for the Forest Service and as a lumber grader at Wineglass Sawmill in the Swan Valley.<sup>46</sup>

John's interests weren't exclusively tied to log building and furniture construction. He was a vocal proponent for environmental conservation, and also served for a number of years as a weather record keeper for the Federal government, sending data to Asheville, N.C. at the end of every month.<sup>47</sup> John was preceded in death by his wife, Marie, in January 1984. John passed away on March 5, 1989.<sup>48</sup>

### John Stark, Craftsman

John initially followed carpentry as a vocation while still in Idaho. However, after his arrival in Montana at Laird's Lodge, he became interested in making furniture after doing so with Marie's brother Robert.<sup>49</sup> John's history of working in lumber mills as a lumber grader, and for the Forest Service, illustrates his affinity for work related to wood and logs. His experience easily translated to his reputation as an excellent craftsman of wood buildings, furniture, and sculptures.

In the 1950s, John, "local home builder and furniture craftsman," approached Henry Meyer about joining John in his business. Henry, who worked for a local mill at the time seized the

<sup>40</sup> 1910 United States Census.

<sup>41</sup> 1920 United States Census.

<sup>42</sup> Marriage Certificate between John Stark and Marie Laird, filed 26 May 1925, Kootenai County, ID.

<sup>43</sup> Obituaries, Marie Laird Stark, *Missoulian*, 19 January 1974.

<sup>44</sup> 1930 United States Census.

<sup>45</sup> Lois Ukrainetz, *letter regarding The National Register of Historic Buildings at Laird's Lodge*, 10 July 1989, on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

<sup>46</sup> Obituaries, John Stark, *Missoulian*, 7 March 1989.

<sup>47</sup> "Good for Burk," *The Missoulian*, 14 November 1969; John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood," *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965; Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> Montana Certificate of Death for Marie L. Stark, filed 1 January 1974; Montana Certificate of Death for John Stark, filed 7 March 1989.

<sup>49</sup> "John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood," *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

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opportunity to learn from a master. “That guy (Stark) could do anything with the old hand tools,” Meyer recalled during an interview with local historian Suzanne Vernon in 2003. Henry relished his time working and learning from the craftsman John Stark, somebody that was “so extremely knowledgeable...” Winters entailed Henry helping John construct his “unique lodgepole furniture” which proved extremely popular among the locals. John’s handcrafted log furniture proved exceedingly comfortable compared to what most people used in the area for furniture. Henry marveled about John that “he was terrific. He was a perfectionist. Everything had to be just so.”<sup>50</sup>

Henry’s wife, Joan, recalled John’s artistry, not just of his exceptionally made furniture, but also of his carved animals. His popularity was such that “his stuff is all over the world. He shipped it everywhere.”<sup>51</sup>

Henry elaborated on John’s skill as he recalled that his apprenticeship with John couldn’t have occurred at a better time: “When I started doing that with him it was almost a dying art. There was hardly anybody who knew how to do that stuff anymore. All the old timers were dying off.”<sup>52</sup> John helped instill in Henry the ethic of building well-constructed cabins and houses highlighted by very tight and close tolerances. While log buildings began to gain popularity in the 1970s (and continue to be popular today), “there were only a few people who knew how to build them” at that time.<sup>53</sup>

Meyer was not the only one to note John’s wood working ability. John’s obituary also acknowledged his craftsmanship in log cabin construction and his wood carving ability, many carvings displayed at the Swan Valley Library in the town of Condon, Montana.<sup>54</sup>

Input by Marie regarding the final products made by John often occurred. Marie provided many of the ideas and also performed all the upholstery work for the furniture sold to clients and in the Stark House itself.<sup>55</sup> Marie upholstered in the room above the living room, affectionately referred to as the “crows nest.” Her tools included a special fold-up cutting table, sewing machines, and moth-proof drawers. One benefit of the location of Marie’s upholstery room was it allowed her to look down over the railing to easily make suggestions regarding John’s work or his selection of wood for future projects.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>51</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>52</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>53</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>54</sup> Obituaries, John Stark, *Missoulian*, 7 March 1989.

<sup>55</sup> “John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood,” *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

<sup>56</sup> “John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood,” *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

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John's reputation as a first-class and highly skilled woodworker often preceded him. His skill and talent were such that he never needed to advertise, staying continually busy with clients through word-of-mouth. A similar situation occurred with other business, such as dude ranches, which often never felt compelled, nor needed, to solicit vacationers.<sup>57</sup> Much of the word-of-mouth commissions John received directly resulted from contact with people who vacationed at his father-in-law's nearby dude ranch, Laird's Lodge at Lindbergh Lake. The patrons of Laird's Lodge served as a ready market for John's talents, who witnessed his handiwork in the lodge and the nearby area.<sup>58</sup> When Laird's Lodge changed hands and became the Diamond L Ranch, from the mid-1940s to the late 1950s, much of the furniture constructed by John continued to be used, including couches, coffee tables, recliners, and porch swings.<sup>59</sup>

John plied his craft in the basement of his house, the subject of this nomination. Many of these commissions were for furniture and animal sculptures. He used a variety of wood over the course of his furniture-making career including juniper, ponderosa, fir, larch, lodgepole, and quaking aspen. After his selection of wood, John meticulously peeled and seasoned the wood without leaving any tell-tale knife marks. Length of seasoning of the wood varied, with the occasional piece requiring eight years before John felt it ready to finish.<sup>60</sup> The finished furniture, were shipped, usually by rail, not only around the United States, but also to many areas of the world. As Vern Guyer succinctly phrased it in an understated way years later, "he had a pretty good business going".<sup>61</sup>

Vern Guyer, a longtime friend of the Starks, continued John's business of making well-constructed furniture. Vern initially met John during his first year of work with the Forest Service when he connected a phone line to John and Marie's log house at Cygnet Lake. It was during those early meetings that Vern caught the furniture-making bug, learning the necessary skills from John.<sup>62</sup>

Mr. Guyer acknowledged John's mastery in a flyer prepared for his own furniture business stating, "Of the early artisans who handcrafted a wide array of rustic furniture, the unique log furniture of John Stark was designed for proportion and durability, and it reflected his artistic nature. Indeed, his work is still sought and collected today." Mr. Guyer elaborated further regarding John's talent, the construction of the furniture in John's original workshop, and how it related to his own wood-working business: "John passed much of the lore of his art to me. I am

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<sup>57</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 220.

<sup>58</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 79, 80.

<sup>59</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 222.

<sup>60</sup> "John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood," *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

<sup>61</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>62</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), pp. 79, 80.

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continuing the tradition of handcrafted lodgepole pine furniture in the original Stark workshop beside Cygnet Lake here in western Montana. This wood species was originally chosen, and is still preferred, because of its growth habit which yields a hard, dense wood that is both straight and sound.” Mr. Guyer learned his wood-crafting skill through many years of watching and assisting John build furniture, including the technique of mortise-and-tenon joints. Mr. Guyer’s observations allowed him to follow many of the same techniques to create his own furniture similar to that made by John.

John’s woodworking skill wasn’t only for commission, his and Marie’s house was, and continues to be, filled with furniture he made. In fact, all the furniture in the Stark House during its occupation by John and Marie, with the exception of the piano, was made by John.<sup>63</sup> These furnishings included a davenport, chairs, matching footstools, matching floor lamps, and a sewing basket constructed from a hollowed burl. A 150-pound coffee table made from a single larch burl with a smaller one inverted for a base replaced an earlier and smaller coffee table John had sold.<sup>64</sup> John also built a large grandfather clock that stood in a corner for years. The present owner, the Guyers, remain committed to preserving the house as John and Maire left it, including the old crank phone mounted on the wall that Vern connected for phone service 70 years ago. The original photos, artwork, furniture and other memorabilia of the Starks continue to occupy the house, with the result that the Stark House stands as a sort of living museum dedicated to everything that was the Starks. The stasis of the house and its contents draw historians who are allowed access to the materials by the Guyers.<sup>65</sup> During the preparation of this nomination, Steve Lamar of the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society returned to the Stark House to take more photographs. His visit elicited the following comment, “The more I look at this place and its contents the more impressed I am. All done by hand tools.”<sup>66</sup>

Interior improvements by John and Marie in the Stark House weren’t limited to furniture. A circular staircase is a striking element. A round larch log was cut, hewed, and then angled to perfectly fit one upon the other, with the railing derived from two saplings seasoned and polished to blend with the staircase.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to furniture-making and sculptures, John stayed busy building log cabins and log houses. Some cabins he constructed around the lake include the “Doc Hawkin’s Cabin;” this cabin may represent the first John constructed for commission.<sup>68</sup> John didn’t always work solo. He went into the cabin and house business with Ed Underwood for a period; together they

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<sup>63</sup> “John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood,” *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

<sup>64</sup> “John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood,” *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> Steve Lamar, personal communication with John Boughton, January 15, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> “John Stark Home Wonderland of Wood,” *The Missoulian*, 13 June 1965.

<sup>68</sup> Suzanne Vernon, Sue Cushman, Sharon Lamar, and Steve Lamar, *As Time Goes By: A Chronology of Swan Valley*, (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, 2013), p. 83.

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constructed houses for sawmill workers at the nearby Wineglass Sawmill.<sup>69</sup> Several times his log building construction rolled into additional work to make the furniture or built-ins, like cabinets.<sup>70</sup>

As succinctly stated by Steve Lamar of the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, “Yes, I would say that John was a cut above many others - especially in the wood furniture and sculpting skills. His pieces are collector items that are actively sought from collectors. And he was noted as a perfectionist in all his endeavors - whether building log houses or making furniture or carving.”<sup>71</sup>

While log building construction was and continues to be a much more crowded field, the talent of building finely crafted log furniture in the Swan Valley during the early years fell to a select few. One of the most respected, other than John Stark, was Peter Rude, a noted cabinet maker and carpenter. Known efforts of Mr. Rude’s furniture making include assisting with building and furnishing the cabins at the Gordon Ranch, less than four miles to the northeast of the Stark House, in the first half of the twentieth century, constructing some of the furniture for the Bar 33 Lodge built by Babe Wilhelm and his sons in 1933, and work for Carl Nelson in 1930.<sup>72</sup> Ed Underwood also earned a reputation for fine furniture and cabinetry in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>73</sup>

Vern Guyer who inherited the Stark House and was a long-time friend of John Stark, also deserves accolades for his furniture-making skill, a craft learned directly from his friend, John Stark. Using Stark’s techniques and plans, Guyer continued the legacy of lodgepole pine furniture building during the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Basics of Log Cabin/House Construction**

Although log buildings are fairly basic in their design and construction, many alternatives exist regarding their final presentation. The all-important foundation can vary from very little, in some cases completely non-existent, to a full concrete footing and stem walls, with log pilings or log sleepers that supported sill logs and joists in between. Interior plans can range from a single pen to multiple pen with individual rooms containing from zero to multiple chimneys or stoves. Log selection involved using the most durable trees available, in most cases (in the Rocky Mountain west) this meant lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, or larch. These trees proved to be relatively straight and rot resistant. Logs can be used in their natural round state or hewed to display a fairly flat exterior surface. Joining these logs together entails using one of several types of corner notching, the most-common being saddle, “v” or steeple notching, half-dovetail notching, and full-dovetail notching. Crown ends near the corners vary in length from very close to the building edge, to extending a foot or more beyond the corner. These crowns

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<sup>69</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 355.

<sup>70</sup> Joanne Guyer, personal communication with Steve Lamar, December 30, 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Steve Lamar, personal communication with John Boughton, January 10, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 138, 191, 192, 287.

<sup>73</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 358.

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may be sawn or cut evenly top to bottom or feature uneven lengths. Chinking and daubing can include wood, stone, moss, oakum, clay, dung, mortar (or mixture of sand, clay, and lime), and other materials; its application often reflects the skill of the builder, or in some cases, the pace of its application. Log houses and cabins sometimes display more finishing using shingles, siding, stucco, or whitewash; this also provides an additional level of protection to the building.<sup>74</sup>

### **Log Cabin Construction in the Swan Valley**

The Swan Valley yielded many skilled log house builders beginning with the settlement of the area in 1916. The tradition of building finely crafted log homes was fueled by the presence of a strong Finnish contingent, many of whom were expert log home builders, and constructed their own log homes and outbuildings. In the Swan Valley, one Finn of note was Jalmar Maki, commonly viewed as a master of traditional Scandinavian log building construction and acknowledged throughout the Swan Valley.<sup>75</sup> His building prowess included helping build the guest cabins at the Gordon Ranch in 1925, all extremely well-constructed.<sup>76</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1960s, Henry Meyer, worked with John Stark learning not only the furniture trade, but also how to build log homes. The knowledge and skill John passed on to Henry Meyer allowed Mr. Meyer to assume the log building business upon John's retirement. Meyer recalled that when he took over the home/cabin building business, the knowledge and craft of making log homes was slowly dying with the people who knew the trade.<sup>77</sup>

By the 1960s, the popularity of log homes construction in the Swan Valley began to increase. This push was associated with developments in the 1950s and 1960s by an increased demand for lumber, the sale of more lumber by the Forest Service, and the resultant hiring of more people at local mills, that in turn boosted the local economy. In addition, the availability of individual lots greatly increased and more importantly, the construction of new roads made access easier to the area.<sup>78</sup>

All these factors fueled the log building construction that gained steam into the 1970s and beyond. With the popularity of log cabin construction soaring, the need arose to meet the demand. Enter, prefabricated log homes, when log builders began to shift from building on-site to making homes and cabins off-site and then shipping the log structure elsewhere. This shift in where and how and the increased use of power tools tended to post-date the work of the earlier

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<sup>74</sup> Cathy Bickenheuser, *Dovetails and Broadaxes: Hands-on Log Cabin Preservation*, (Missoula: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service National Technology and Development Program, 2015), pp. 11-20.

<sup>75</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 36, 37, 357; Steve Lamar personal communication with John Boughton, January 9, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), pp. 191, 192.

<sup>77</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>78</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), pp. 165, 166.

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log cabin builders who had garnered reputations as craftsmen who used mostly hand tools, such as John Stark.

This shift allowed people like Henry Meyer the convenience of building the log structures locally. The buildings could now be shipped though some builders offered to move, assemble, and finish off the log cabin or house. Meyer subsequently teamed with Walt Styler, another log home builder, in making log homes.<sup>79</sup> Other builders of log homes and cabins included Reuben Kauffman, who teamed up with Ed Underwood, some which were built off-site and shipped elsewhere and other built on-site.<sup>80</sup> Ed Underwood also teamed up with Lee Wilhelm to construct houses and cabins for shipment near the beginning of the “Swan Valley’s log home era”.<sup>81</sup>

One of the largest log cabin and house builders in the Swan Valley was Rustics of Lindbergh Lake, started in 1969 by Jim Busch.<sup>82</sup> In 1971, Joe Wilhelm, another accomplished log-home builder, was offered a job with the company, a job he held for 20 years, sharing his expertise as a builder of log buildings. Staying true to the formula practiced by other log builders in the early 1970s, Rustics of Lindbergh Lake constructed off-site and then moved the buildings to their destination.<sup>83</sup> By 1979, when Darlene Kaser worked for the company, the business employed around 100 people.<sup>84</sup> Some of the people who originally worked for Rustics of Lindbergh Lake eventually spun off, starting their own businesses including Henry Meyer III, Wes Kesterson, Gary Freyholtz, and Rick Birdwell.<sup>85</sup>

### **Architectural Significance**

The Stark House gains additional significance under Criterion C. The Stark House stands as an exquisite example of mid-century rural vernacular rustic architecture in the Swan Valley of Montana. John Stark’s skills in carpentry and crafting fine wood furniture is highlighted by the precision construction of the Stark House. While the house embodies a distinctive method of construction, the quality and craftsmanship stand a notch above most log structures, even those at the nearby National Register-listed Laird’s Lodge. While log buildings, almost by definition, lack overt ornamentation, the high-quality craftsmanship displayed on the Stark House virtually serves as a form of ornamentation to the overall building. Finished in 1939, the beautiful log

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<sup>79</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 244.

<sup>80</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), pp. 165, 166.

<sup>81</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 358.

<sup>82</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 358.

<sup>83</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), pp. 380, 381.

<sup>84</sup> Suzanne M. Vernon, *Montana: Voices of the Swan* (Condon, MT: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. 2011), p. 162.

<sup>85</sup> Steve Lamar personal communication with John Boughton, January 9, 2020.

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house easily conveys the attention, workmanship, and detailed efforts of John Stark, from the selection of uniform logs to the perfectly applied daubing over split pole chinking. Presentation of log cabins or houses varies from utilitarian, with little attention to detail, to painstakingly detailed depending on the skill of the builder. The Stark House falls on the painstaking-detailed side of the scale.

The design of the Stark House follows the usual cabin-design of these types of buildings in the rural west, including a front facing gable, a single off-center gable entry, and roof slopes generally less than 45 degrees. Gable entries prove important especially during periods of heavy snow as they allow easier access compared to doors set under eaves that are susceptible to snow load slide-off. The entry door of the Stark Cabin is protected by a board-and-batten entry addition topped by a shed roof displaying a lesser slope than the roof topping the main gable section, but still sufficient to shed the snow load away from the building.

With the exception of the present metal roofing, all materials used to build the house were obtained locally including the logs for the walls, and the stone for the chimney. John used western larch trees from the Flathead National Forest to construct his house, a tradition followed by the early homesteaders in the area. Strong and durable, larch trees grow tall and straight and the slow-growing trees produce dense wood, which usually yield fewer cracks when drying. The wood of the larch ranks as one of the strongest among softwoods. In keeping with the tradition of many of the local homesteaders, John used the Western Saddle Notch method of log joinery with a traditional lateral groove, insuring the tight fit noticeable on the house, and providing the highest possible level of insulation against the elements. Today, this method of log joinery still predominates for local log home builders in Swan Valley. The fit and finish of each notch easily exceeds most log cabins found in the area, despite the common use of the notching style. The use of locally available materials allows the Stark House to complement its forested and rural setting. The Stark House retains a high degree of integrity and stands as a sterling example of simple, yet exceptionally-well constructed log building.

Stark House  
Name of Property

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## 9: Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/86f5/02311b7be579d623b24c86ce4cab285bcab4.pdf>.

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Vernon, Suzanne M. *Montana: Voices of the Swan*. 2011. An Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc. publication.

Zdanys, Vytautas. *Stark: His Hands Urge Wood to Life*. August 5, 1982. Ponderosa Press.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc.

Stark House  
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**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreege of Property** 2.376 acres

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 47.40888, -113.71616- Longitude: -113.71616

### Verbal Boundary Description

The Stark House is located in the NW ¼ of Section 13, T19N., R17W. P.M.M, Registration # 35 E S. Per the Montana Cadastral (<http://svc.mt.gov/msl/mtcadastral>), the Stark House sits in “S13, T19N, R17W, IN NW1/4 (NO PORTION OF DE 985).” The house is bounded to the west and south by a small gravel parking lot/drive and to the east and north by trees. See attached map Section 9 page 31; reference to the aerial view map confirms that boundary.

### Boundary Justification

Boundaries for the Stark House are drawn to encompass the building and the immediate grounds surrounding it, providing a 15 ft. boundary on each side of the house.

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Steve Lamar, President  
organization: Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, Inc.  
street & number: 6774 HWY 83 N / PO Box 1128  
city or town: Condon state: MT zip code: 59826  
e-mail lamar@blackfoot.net  
telephone: 406-754-2745  
date: January 17, 2020

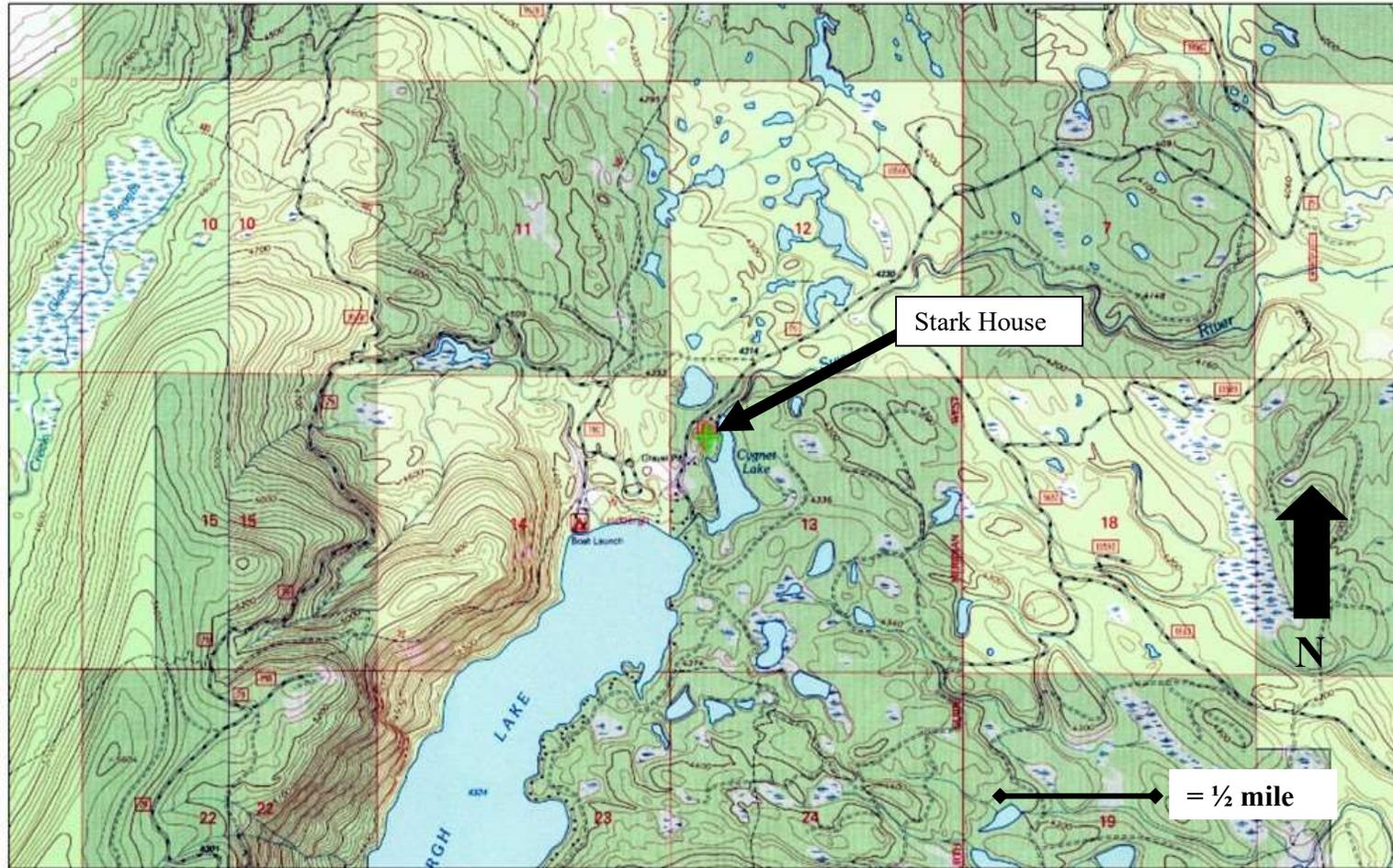
and

name/title: John Boughton  
organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
street & number: 1301 E. Lockey  
: MT zip code: 59620  
jboughton@mt.gov  
telephone: (406) 444-3647  
date: January 17, 2020

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**Additional Documentation: Maps and floorplans**



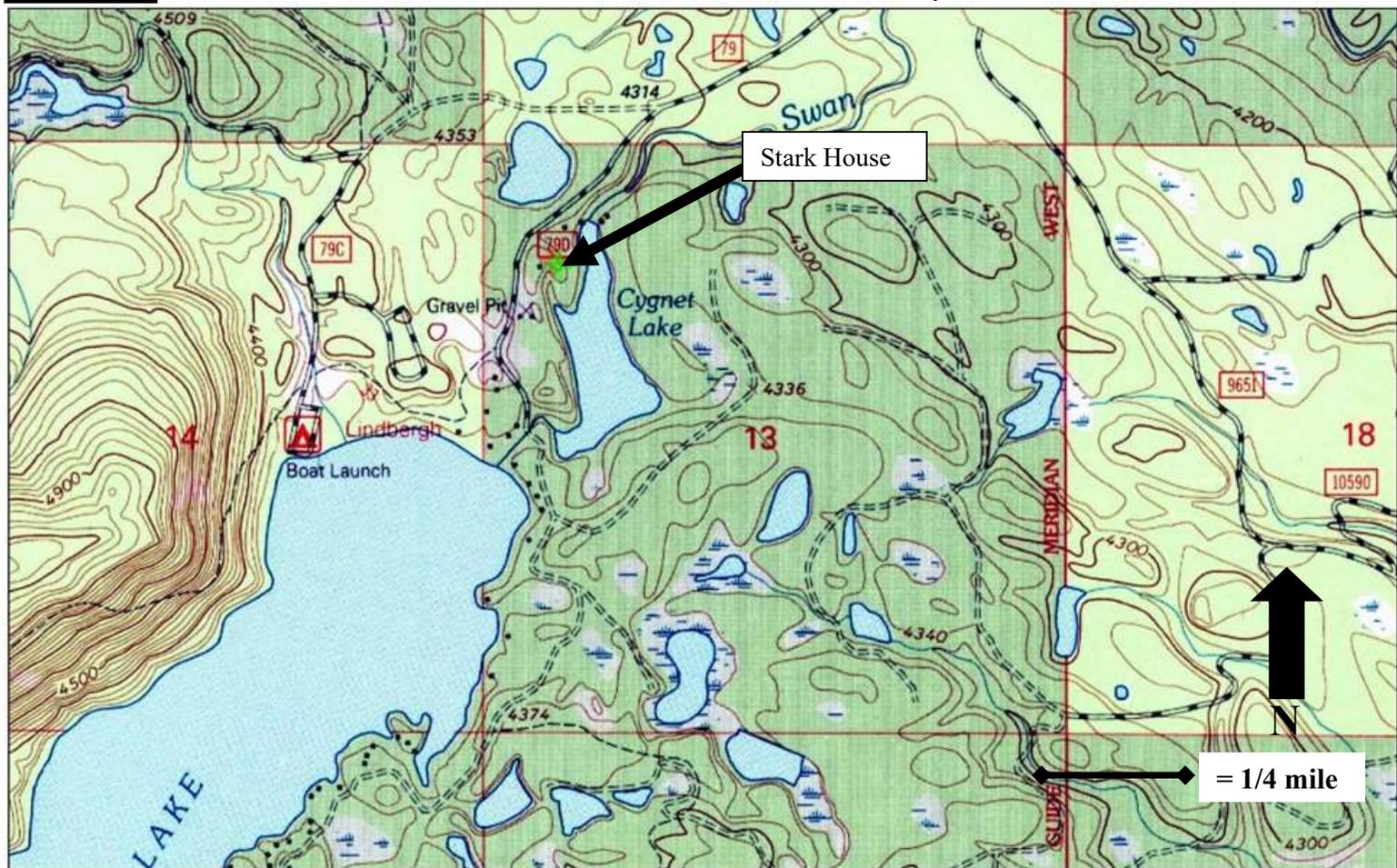
Montana State Library - Digital Library  
(406) 444-5354 | [geoinfo@mt.gov](mailto:geoinfo@mt.gov) | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Map created using the Digital Atlas January 31, 2020  
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

**Location of Stark House in NW 1/4 of Section 13, T.19N., R.17W. Found on the Cygnet Lake 7.5' quadrangle map.**

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Montana State Library - Digital Library  
(406) 444-5354 | [geoinfo@mt.gov](mailto:geoinfo@mt.gov) | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Map created using the Digital Atlas January 31, 2020  
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

**Close-up view of location of Stark House in NW ¼ of Section 13, T.19N., R.17W**

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**Stark House Aerial Photo. 2018.**

Stark House  
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County and State



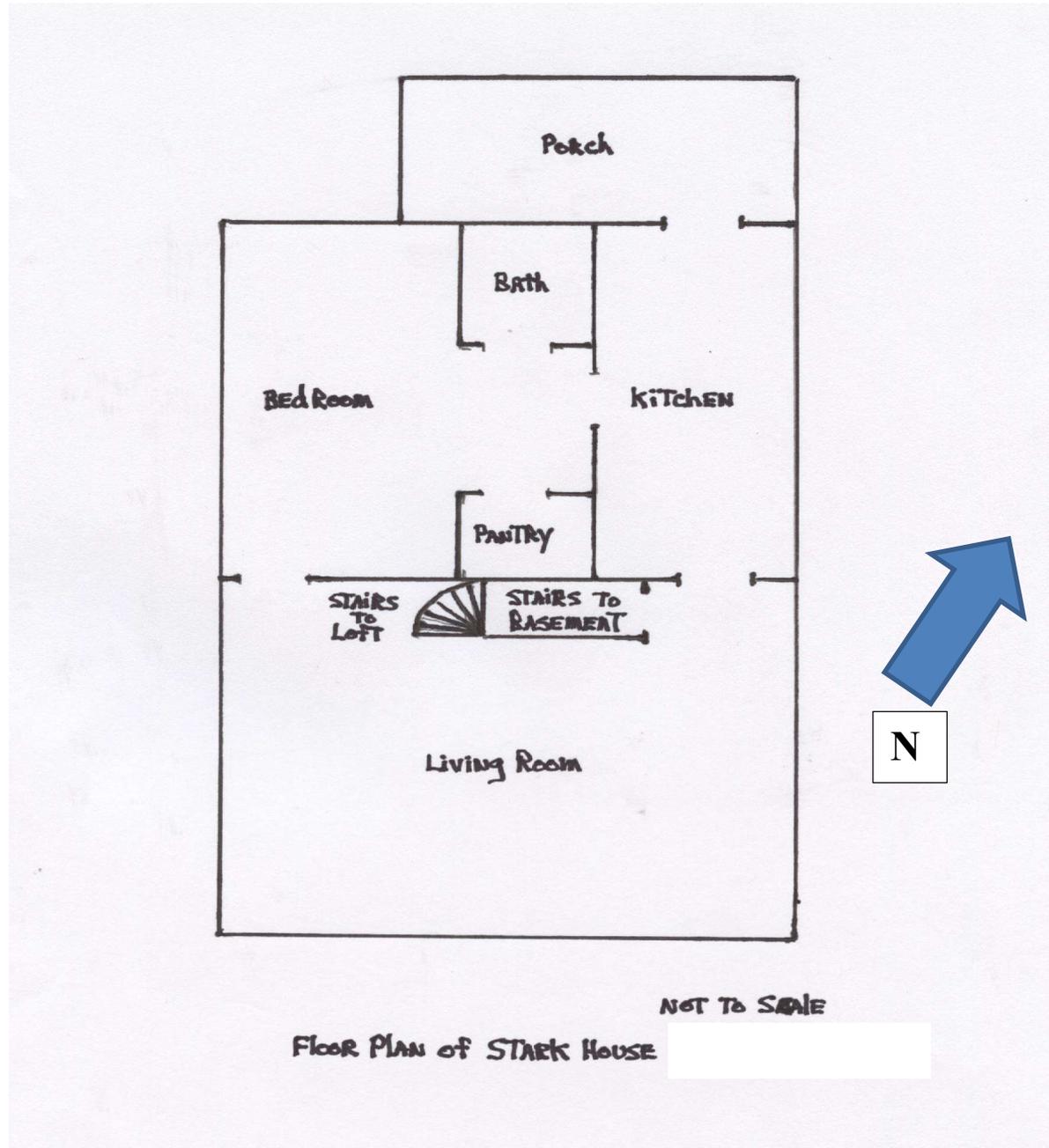
Map created using the Digital Atlas April 13, 2020  
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Montana State Library - Digital Library  
(406) 444-5354 | [geoinfo@mt.gov](mailto:geoinfo@mt.gov) | <http://msl.mt.gov>

**Close up aerial of Stark House showing property boundary.**

Stark House  
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Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State

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## Historic Photographs



Marie and John Stark on their wedding day in 1925.  
Photographer: Unknown.



Constructing the concrete basement of the Stark House. Looking east toward Cygnet Lake. 1939.  
Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

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John Stark notching the lateral groove along a house log that he is working on. The intricate log floor joists are pictured in the photo. Looking to the northeast. 1939. Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

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Looking northwest. Pictured on the left is a 'jammer' that was used to lift the larch logs up onto the log house. 1939. Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

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Constructing the log gables and purlins of the Stark House. Looking to the north. 1939.  
Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



The log construction phase of the Stark House has been completed. Looking northeast. 1939.  
Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



John Stark standing in front of the Stark House. Looking east. 1939. Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Friends gather at the Stark House. Looking northeast. 1939. Photographer: Marie and John Stark.



Laird's Lodge, approximately .3 mile from Stark House. Looking north. 1939. Photographer: Marie and John Stark.

Stark House  
Name of Property

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John Stark constructing a log house in the Swan Valley in 1953. Photographer: Vern Guyer.

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



John Stark working on custom log furniture. Date unknown. Photographer: Marie Stark.

Stark House  
Name of Property

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County and State

**National Register Photographs  
Photo Log**



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: December 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, north and east elevations, view to the southeast.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0001

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: June 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, north elevation, view to the south.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0002

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: June 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, west and south elevations, view to the north.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0003

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: June 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, east elevation, view to the west-southwest.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0004

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: June 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, north and east elevations, view to the east-southeast.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0005

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: June 2019

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House showing date of construction on south wall. Looking north.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0006

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior showing staircase.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0007

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, window close-up.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0008

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

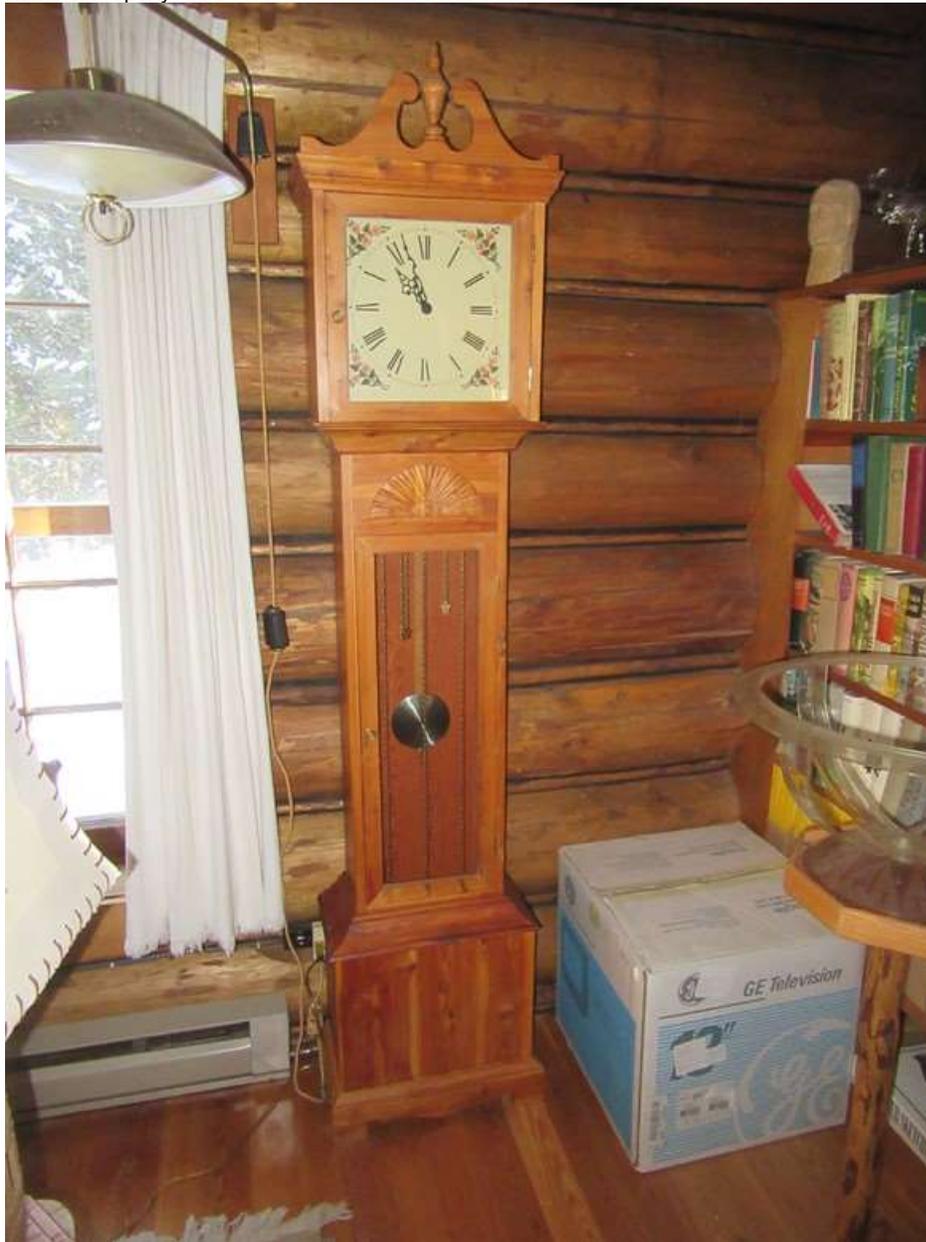
Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0009

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing grandfather clock built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0010

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing cabinetry built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0011

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing furniture built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0012

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing furniture built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0013

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing furniture built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0014

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: The Stark House, interior, showing furniture built by John Stark.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0015

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House  
City or Vicinity: Condon  
County: Missoula State: MT  
Photographer: Steve Lamar  
Date Photographed: January 2020  
Description of Photographs and number: A carving of an elk by John Stark. On display at the Swan Valley Library.  
Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0016

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: A mountain goat carved by John Stark. On display at the Swan Valley Library.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0017

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: A common loon carved by John Stark. On display at the Swan Valley Library.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0018

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: A big horn sheep carved by John Stark. On display at the Swan Valley Library.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0019

Stark House  
Name of Property

Missoula, Montana  
County and State



Name of Property: Stark House

City or Vicinity: Condon

County: Missoula State: MT

Photographer: Steve Lamar

Date Photographed: January 2020

Description of Photographs and number: A wolverine carved by John Stark. On display at the Swan Valley Library.

Photo #: MT\_MissoulaCounty\_StarkHouse\_0020